



Support Association for the Women of Afghanistan Published by SAWA-Australia Inc. A38759 ABN: 73 162 014 759

Articles have been accepted in good faith, if you have any queries please contact the editor

Order your SAWA Christmas cards now! Send a friend a gift by making a donation! Fill out the enclosed order form or get made-to-order cards from the SAWA website.

FROM THE CONVENER

I just returned from a week in Kabul. I stayed in Orphanage for girls, one of RAWA's orphanages in the capital. I enjoyed great hospitality and had the opportunity to be present when the results for the first semester were handed out at the Vocational Training Centre for Women. The Centre is SAWA's major support project, and RAWA acknowledges this by showing SAWA's banner on the Centre's sign:

RAWA is still threatened by fundamentalists, even in Kabul. To avoid placing people in danger, this photo has been removed.

A more detailed report on my trip is on page 3 of this SAWAN. The committee's decision to publish the SAWAN in colour has received a favourable response. One member said: "The new format is well presented, the colourful photos bring the children close and sadly reveal the destruction of Khewa camp." The many photos from my trip call for colour, too. As prices for colour printing have come down significantly lately, future SAWAN editions will continue to be produced in colour.

Matthias Tomczak

Note: The name of the orphanage has been removed for security reasons.

Successful fundraising in Sydney

In September SAWA's Sydney group organized an art and craft sale in support of Hewad High School and raised over \$2,500.

The success was due to many including those who braved the rain, who designed the leaflet, businesses and individuals who printed for free the 400 leaflets that our local walkers delivered, along with other local business support and those involved setting up and helping out on the day.

Special thanks go to June and Paul Lunsman (and Jack) for giving their home over, on that very wet weekend, to SAWA members and supporters.

The generosity of Annie Bell, packing to transport her home and family to Burma at the end of September, cannot go unmentioned. I met Annie when she attended the first SAWA lunch at Finola's in November 2006. Since then her involvement has contributed to raising over \$12,000 at "Shopping for SAWA" fundraisers. In every community she becomes part of, Annie's generosity is outstanding. Thank you Annie.

SAWA supporters Nicky Peacocke and Kathy Tane have taken over Annie's business which will now be known as *Tamarind Trading*. Helen Toner has offered her home at 98 Darling St, Balmain East, as the venue for a "Shopping for SAWA" fundraiser on Saturday 22nd November. On the day SAWA will benefit from your Christmas shopping.

Thursday November 20th is the date set for our 3rd annual SAWA lunch at Finola's. For details see the *events* page at the SAWA website.

Dawn Atkinson

Recognition for SAWA secretary Barbara James

In October SAWA Secretary Barbara James received an award from Soroptimist International Eastern Districts for her voluntary contribution to SAWA as being a "local woman who has made a

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SAWA OBJECTIVES

- Raise funds to assist in development and relief projects for Afghan women and children;
- increase community awareness of the forgotten needs of Afghan women;
- encourage women, men and young people to join SAWA-Australia ;
- set up SAWA/RAWA support groups throughout Australia.

Convener:	Matthias Tomczak	Auditor:	Bob Shahinger
Secretary:	Barbara James		
Treasurer:	Olga Enigk		
Membership Officer:	Helen Fletcher		
Committee:	Dawn Atkinson, Ann Clarke, Grace McCaughey, Ruth Redfern		
Newsletter Editor:	Matthias Tomczak		
Public Officer:	Ruth Redfern		

difference". SAWA enjoys a wonderful association with the various Soroptimist clubs in SA. In particular the organization has pledged \$4,000 for handicraft training at the Vocational Training Centre in Kabul. We thank Soroptimist International again for their ongoing support and friendship. SAWA is honoured by this gesture and appreciates the ongoing support from Soroptimist International for its projects.



An invitation from OEEGA

Another women's organization that SAWA has formed a close relationship with recently is OEEGA, the Organization of Hellene and Hellene-Cypriot Women of Australia. SAWA secretary Barbara James was invited to speak at their National Biennial Conference in Adelaide 10-11 October, 2008. Her topic was "Women in Afghanistan - is there hope?" This talk provided a powerful contrast to the theme of the conference which was entitled "New Visions, New Directions. An exploration of the role, challenges, and achievements of women in the 21st century". The audience, who came from a variety of backgrounds, disciplines and professions, were moved to learn that in Afghanistan the status of women has actually gone backwards over the last 30 years. SAWA looks forward to working with OEEGA in the future.

Thank you to supporters and donors

Several organizations and supporters again sent significant donations during the last quarter.

The Barossa Valley group of Soroptimist International sent \$200 as part of the Soroptimist pledge to support handicraft training in the Vocational Training Centre.

The Australian Education Union, one of SAWA's major sponsors, again raised funds at their annual meeting and could send us \$484.

Students of Loreto College, who have pen pals at Hewad High School, raised \$200. Their friendship with the boys and girls of

Hewad High School was highlighted in the September issue of *Southern Cross*, the magazine of Catholic schools. One of the girls commented: "We realized that they're just like us, just they have it a lot harder than us".



Georgia Aoukar, Rebecca Carpenter and Shani De Silva read letters from their Afghani pen pals. (From the *Southern Cross*)

Computers for Hewad High School

In May we asked our supporters to raise funds so that SAWA can provide Hewad High School with computers. (See SAWAN no.18) Our appeal did not fall on deaf ears. Supporters in the education area in particular – and that includes students as well as teachers – came to help us, and cheques were coming in.

We now have the funds to set up a small computer lab in the school. Unfortunately, the landlord in Rawalpindi wanted to raise the rent beyond RAWA's capability to pay, so the school had to move. The new building is much smaller than the previous building, and there is no room for a dedicated computer lab.

We discussed the situation with RAWA. It is clear that in today's world computer literacy is an essential part of a good education and Hewad High School has to be able to offer a computer course.

The solution is that the school will hold computer courses during the long summer vacation in July and August. The refugee children in Rawalpindi do not have much opportunity to go on holiday trips and will be keen to use their time productively and attend a computer course.

We thank all supporters who contributed to our "computers for Hewad High School" appeal and are glad to be able to report that their donations will be converted into computers very soon.

New SAWA greeting cards

In the last SAWAN we showed examples of pictures drawn by students of Hewad High School and an associated orphanage as part of the pen pal arrangement with Loreto College. We foreshadowed that SAWA would produce greeting cards based on them. The cards have been available from the website for a while. SAWA members who receive the SAWAN by mail receive a sample card and an order form with this issue.

The cards were designed by Katherine Close of LC design, one of SAWA's sponsors. We thank Katherine for her wonderful work and hope to see many orders coming in before the Christmas rush. We can fill all orders within days.

A visit to Kabul, October 2008

Life in Kabul is easy – if you are a visitor from overseas, provided with a beautiful guest room with own shower and toilet in one of RAWA's orphanages. The orphanage is in one of the better suburbs of Kabul, where the streets are like badly corrugated dirt roads bordered by smelly little creeks but the houses are only a few years old and have bright, large rooms with high ceilings and wide windows.

What is life in Kabul really like? There is no running water. Electricity is supplied every three days for 3 hours. There are no street lights anywhere, so the city goes dark after 5 pm. Those who can afford it have a private generator. The orphanage has two, a small one that supplies power to computers and internet and a large one that comes on at 6 pm and runs for four hours to supply electricity to the house.

Those who can afford it have their own bore. The water has to be brought up from 30 metres, which requires a powerful pump. If you cannot afford a powerful generator you have to pump the water up during the day when the city supplies 3 hours of electricity. Usually the amount of water pumped during that time does not last for three days, so the water runs out after a day or two and you have to collect water from one of the public pumps.

The generator of orphanage guarantees that a trickle of water keeps coming out of the tap every day. I am told that tomorrow is the day of 3 hours public electricity supply, so that will be the opportunity to heat up the water in my hot water tank, which should then remain hot enough to allow a warm shower for the next day or two.

Having arrived only yesterday, I managed to sleep in until 10 am Adelaide time, very late on my standards but 4 am Kabul time. The city was in total darkness. Occasionally some dogs barked, the first cockerel crowed - sounds you are used to hear in an Australian country town. There was no electricity in the orphanage, so I went back to bed trying to get some more sleep.

5 am: It is still totally dark, but all over the city the muezzins can be heard, to my surprise much more melodiously than what you sometimes hear in movies or on television. I go out to the balcony, listen to the melodies, watch a dozen feral dogs run along the street and go back to bed.

5:45am: I wake up from the roar of jet fighters. There is no mistaking them for passenger planes; I know the sound from the 1960s and 70s when NATO fighters performed their exercises over northern Germany, flying low over the North Sea and the coastal villages. It may be 40 years ago but it is a sound you do not forget. The planes fade into the distance, then come back to circle over the city before disappearing; no passenger jet would do that.

6am: There is now enough light that I can see the keys on my computer keyboard, so I get up, have a quick cold wash in the crisp air and sit down to write this first report. The birds have woken up, and the sound of the city is dominated by their songs. Trucks and 4WDs collect people to drive them to work; all are wrapped against the cold, the women covered in huge white head scarves.

..... orphanage is home to a couple that lives with the 65 children. There is also a cook, a caretaker and a driver for the

car but no guard. I was told when I came that the guard, a poor man from the country, had just returned to his village because it is not safe for his wife and daughter to live on their own, without a man in the house. Everyone was quite sad because he was the most dedicated man and everybody loved him.

Yesterday news came that his wife's brother had agreed to move in with the guard's wife and daughter so that he could come back. When I returned from a visit to the Vocational Training Center in the afternoon he had already arrived and stood at the door; a thin, prematurely aged man with weathered skin and yellowed teeth, he was greeted with big hugs by everyone in the courtyard.

This morning Amena took me on a sightseeing tour. We went with two cars, Amena, I and our driver in one car and two armed security guards with a driver in the second car. Amena says that the main danger for foreigners is to be kidnapped, so RAWA hired the guards for me. We began with a drive through Afshar, the suburb where the Hazara live and where most of the women who attend classes in the Vocational Training Center come from. During the Civil War of 1992 - 1996 this area had been the scene of a genocide; several thousand Hazaras were slaughtered during a massacre and their houses flattened. The survivors have returned and rebuilt their houses, but the government has not spent a cent on the suburb.



Afshar scenes

When I called the streets in the better suburbs badly corrugated dirt roads bordered by smelly little creeks, the streets here can only be described as washed-out bush tracks full of sewage and

rubbish. Several times our driver had to get out of the car to test the depth of a sewage canal or the firmness of a pile of rubbish on the road before he was sure that he could get the car across. But wherever there was a problem the local people always volunteered their help.

First semester results handed out at the Vocational Training Centre

My visit coincides with the beginning of the second semester in the Vocational Training Center. Yesterday the students assembled in the courtyard to receive the results for their first semester. Some had brought their small children along; it was a lively scene. The principal had organized a small ceremony with poetry readings, songs and a short theatre play. All presentations were about the importance of education and the equality between women and men. The students were proud to show their reading skills, struggling occasionally with their poems but leaving the stage under much applause. The greatest success was the theatre play. A girl was to be married to an uneducated boy. There was much argument, and no player had any problem

with her text, since they only had to play out scenes that happen at home. The girl insisted that she would only marry an educated man, so in the end the boy agreed to get an education, too, so that he could marry her.

Then the results were handed out. One by one the students received a document and returned to their seats. Once everything was over the commotion started.

Everyone congregated around the teachers and argued about the notes. Some offered to sit the exam again, "and this time I'll be first!" There were even tears – from the woman that had received third prize, because she had expected to be first. Amena became quite concerned and said that maybe it would be better to hand out only a pass but no notes. I said that the first exam of one's life is always an intense experience, particularly if you have to pass it as a "mature student" and had to fight for the right to attend the course in the first place. Maybe the students should be consulted whether they want marks or prefer a simple pass.

Eventually calm returned, and everyone went home consoled with what they had achieved.

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The teachers at the Vocational Training Centre. Names and other details have been removed for security reasons.

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Teacher calls out the students' names and teacher hands out the results for the first semester

The Centre still requires funding for the planned handicraft training course. The demand is so strong that the Centre took out a loan from



The first sewing machines for handicraft training

RAWA's general budget to start the course. This loan has to be repaid. **Only your donations can guarantee that the course continues!**



To become a member of SAWA go to <http://sawa-australia.org/joinus.htm> or write to SAWA's PO Box. Send a message to membership@sawa-australia.org if you wish to receive the SAWAN by email rather than ordinary mail.